Chapter XI

Marital, Parental, and Kinship Avoidances

593 602 In our description of the engagement and marriage customs we have already mentioned some obligations of mutual avoidance. After marriage a certain mutual avoidance continues not only between the couple but also between parent and child, and between the couple and their kinship by marriage.

§ 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE CUSTOMS

The NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIANS. Among the oldest reports we have are those of Pallas. He informs us that in the eighteenth century the Cherkess husband and wife were not allowed to appear together before strangers.[1] In fact, for a year after marriage or till the birth of the first child the husband was not allowed to visit his wife except secretly.[2] And even afterwards when the couple lived under the same roof, they were not allowed to share the same room. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Longworth and Dubois de Montpéreux noticed the same custom, practiced in all its rigour, which both authors compare to the spirit of the ancient Spartans.[3] The *adat* collections of about an hundred years ago likewise speak of this strict separation of husband and wife in public and private life.[4] In the beginning of this century, Vasil'kov wrote that the Temirgoi customary law does not permit a wife as much as to mention the name of her husband in the presence of others. She must always use the pronoun "he" instead.[5]

[591] Though the Northwesterners of today have given up many of their ancient practices, they have not abandoned these rules of marital avoidance. Ladyženskij found them still in our own times. For a year after marriage the wife must live with strangers, during which time her husband may visit her only secretly. To be seen with her in public even years after marriage, he informs us, is tabooed.[6]

This avoidance includes even the children of the family, as we have seen in our section on "Parental Affection for Offspring" (pp. 149 f). Throughout

[1] *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die süd. Statth., etc.*, I, p. 388.
[2] *ibid.*
[3] Longworth, *op. cit.*, I, p. 285; Dubois de Montpéreux, *op. cit.*, I, p. 115.
[4] Leontovič, II, pp. 254 f, § 176.
[5] "Očerk byta temirgoevcev," SMOMPK, XXIX (1901), No. 1, p. 99.
[6] Ladyženskij, FT. p. 184 *note*; Ladyženskij, "Zur Erforschung der Rechtsgewohnheiten der Bergvölker des Kaukasus," Zeitsch. f. Ethnologie, LXII (1930), pp. 242.

p. 162

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RH1 Caucasia RH1

the Caucasus a father is forbidden to manifest his affection for his child. The Cherkess is forbidden even to speak of a child of a person present.[7]

Similar *adats* forbid a couple to appear together before their parents or parents-in-law for a year after marriage,[8] and among the Abkhaz, even longer.[9]

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. These rules of avoidance are found also among the Chechens, with only accidental differences. After marriage the groom must leave his wife and family and live with some neighbours or relatives for two to three weeks.[10] But even afterwards, when he returns, a certain law of separation must be observed. Reineggs reporting on the customs in the eighteenth century mentions that the husband did not share a common room with his wife ; the men, he tells us, lived apart from the children and the female members of the family.[11] Another *adat* forbids a husband to eat with his wife in the presence of strangers.[12] And even in strictest privacy he will never speak directly to her in the second person : he usually will turn aside somewhat and instead of saying "Give me," he will say, "I am in need of."[13]

An Ingush father is not only forbidden to carry or fondle his child in public, but is not even allowed to call it by its name,[14] when others are present.

Jakovlev assures us that one can meet Ingushi today who have not seen their mothers-in-law for fifteen years after the wedding,[15] for to do so would be a serious violation of an Ingush custom. A wife is forbidden to mention the name of a first cousin of her husband in the presence of her parents- or brothers-in-law.[16] A husband may never inquire about his wife's relatives.[17] He will not speak with his wife in the presence of his parents or older brothers.[18] According to Dubrovin, a wife is strictly forbidden to speak with her father-in-law or any near male relative of her husband for a certain time after the wedding. She may speak with her mother-in-law only after a number of months have elapsed.[19]

There is also a certain avoidance observed by the husband and wife among the mountain tribes of Daghestan. A Lesghian, for example, will never put his arm around his wife while dancing. Such signs of intimacy in the presence of others would be unthinkable.[20]

We have already mentioned the example of how a certain Boulat-khan brought on himself the contempt of a group of men of Andi for carrying his son

[7] Pallas, *l. c.*
[8] Ladyženskij, FT, p. 186.
[9] Byhan, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
[10] Cf. Jakovlev, *Ingali*, p. 56.
[11] Reineggs, *op. cit.*, I, p. 41.
[12] Leontovič, II, p. 254, § 170.
[13] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 438.
[14] Grabovskij, "Inguši, ich žizn i obyčai," SSKG, IX (1876), p. 49.
[15] Jakovlev, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 57.
[16] Jakovlev, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[17] *ibid.*
[18] *ibid.*
[19] *Istorija*, I, i, p. 434.
[20] Nansen, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RH1 Caucasia RH1

in his arms; to make up for the transgression of the *adat* forbidding public manifestation of affection for one's children, he took out his dagger, crying, "I love my son, but you shall see also that I don't mind killing him," and if the men had not succeeded in calming him, he would have actually killed the child.[21]

It is indeed striking that we do not find the parent-in-law avoidances among the Lesghians; at least we have not found any reports in this regard. Parent-in-law avoidances would be quite impossible among the Lesghians, owing to the rule of endogamy.[22]

The SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS. Among the mountain tribes of Georgia the bride and groom, after having spent three days together,[23] are obliged to separate, the groom remaining with his parents and the bride returning to her family. The period of separation, according to Eristov, was a fortnight, according to Seidlitz, depending on agreement,[24] and according to Kosven, "for some weeks or years."[25] In ancient Imeretia the newly-weds would live at the bride's house for a week, after which the young man returned to his father's house, while his wife remained with her family for a year.[26] During the period of separation the husband might visit his wife only secretly. On her return to her husband she did not share a common room with him.[27] A Pshav couple may not call each other by name; instead they use the words "Man!" and "Woman!"[28] Similarly, the wife may not call any of her husband's male relatives by name.[29] In Svanetia one may not inquire about the health of the wife of another person unless related to her.[30] A Svan will never permit his wife to sit down beside him; and, in general, he is very reluctant to converse with her.[31] In Khevsuria a father may not carry his child in his arms or say a single friendly word to it in the presence of others.[32]

The OSSETES. In Ossetia the husband must live at the groomsman's house for a whole month after the wedding. He is forbidden to oppear before his father, older members of the household, or any older relatives and may visit his wife only secretly.[33] As soon as the young wife becomes pregnant she returns to her family and stays there till the child is born.[34]

---

[21] *Supra*, pp. 149 f.

[22] *Supra*, pp. 51 f.

[23] Nansen, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[24] Eristov, *op. cit.*, p. 110. Seidlitz, "Gemeinde- und Familienleben der Chewsuren," *Das Ausland*, 1891, No. 16, p. 320.

[25] M. O. Kosven, "Perežitki matriarchata u narodov Kavkaza," SE, 1936, No. 4—5, p. 217.

[26] *ibid.*

[27] Eristov, *op. cit.*, p. 111. See also Eichwald, *Reise auf dem Kaspischen Meer und in den Kaukasus*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 204.

[28] Makalatija, "Iz starogo narodnogo byta Pšavov," SE, 1938, No. 1, p. 109.

[29] Hahn, *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, p. 82.

[30] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 109.

[31] *ibid.*

[32] *Supra*, p. 150.

[33] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 269.

[34] Hahn, "Die Täler der 'Grossen Ljachwa' und Ksanka (ksan) und das südliche Ossetien," *Globus*, LXXXVIII (1905), p. 24. It is worthy of note that the Kurds and the Armenians

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHI Caucasia RHI

We have given a number af examples (*supra*, p. 150) illustrating how Ossetine fathers and mothers are forbidden to take their children in their arms, or by hand, or offer them anything, in the presence of older members of the family. The Ossete would permit his child to die rather than transgress this rule.

A woman may never in her whole life speak to an older male member of her husbands's family, and if, for instance, the wife of a younger brother is busy at the hearth, an elder brother is not allowed to enter the room till she has finished her work.[35]

The neighbouring TURKS observe similar rules of avoidance. Thus the Karachai newly-weds live together for a few months and then the bride must return to her parental home for a period which may last two years. During this time her husband may visit her only secretly.[36] The Nogai will not speak to his wife in the presence of elderly people except in extreme necessity. The wife must always appear veiled before her husband for a year after marriage or till she gives birth to a child.[37] A Kumykian couple may never call each other by name; instead they refer to each other as "him" and "her."[38]

§ 2. PROBLEMS OF POSSIBLE ORIGIN AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RULES OF AVOIDANCE

We may divide the customs just described into several distinct groups. The following table will show that these rules of avoidance are genuinely Caucasian, found among all North Caucasians and neighbouring peoples.

(1) The first custom which calls for special attention is that requiring the bride to return to her family shortly after marriage and permitting the husband to visit her only secretly. We found this custom in Ossetia, Armenia, Kurdistan, Chechnia, Georgia and among the Caucasian Turks. The Cherkess bride, however, does not return to her own parents but goes to a neighbouring family. This temporary visit-marriage, though still not definitely proven, may be connected with matrilocality, and therefore this custom may be a vestige of a mother-right culture.

It is interesting that the Cherkess bride lives with *strangers* during this period and not with her own family. Ladyženskij[39] considers this practice a vestige of the original form of acquiring a wife, namely bride-stealing. When a bride was stolen she, naturally, had to hide, and here, he argues, we have a clear

had a similar observance. Among the Kurds the bride would return to her family a few days after her marriage. Her stay with her parents, however, was very short, lasting about three days or so. After receiving some gifts from her family she returned to her husband Cf. Kosven, *l. c.*). The custom of the bride returning to her family after the wedding is also an Armenian practice (*ibid.*).

[35] Baddeley, *l. c.*

[36] Jankó, "Néprajzi, etc." Zichy, *Kaukázusi és középázsia utazásai*, p. 44.

[37] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 279.

[38] Dubrovin, *op. cit.*, I, i, p. 639.

[39] "Zur Erforschung der Rechtsgewohnheiten der Bergvölker des Kaukasus," *Zeitsch. f. Ethnologie*. XLII (1930), p. 242.

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RHI Caucasia RHI
The Family
166

TABLE 18

Rules of Marital, Parental, and Kinship Avoidance

RULES	Abkhaz	Cherkess	Chechens	Lesghians	Mountaineers of Georgia	Ossetes	Karachai
1. Bride and groom must live separately after wedding	For a year or till first child	For a year or till first child	For two or three weeks	No	Three to fourteen days	For a month after the wedding	Live together one month, then separate
2. Bride returns to her own family after the wedding	Bride lives with strangers	Bride lives with strangers	No, but husband must live elsewhere 2 to 3 weeks	No	Yes	Yes, goes to own family some months after wedding	Two months to two years with own family
3. Husband may visit wife during this period only secretly	Yes ?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Married couples may not appear together in public or before strangers	Yes	Yes	Yes	No			
5. When living in same house after period of separation the couple may not share common quarters	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
6. May not mention name of husband		May not do so before others	Husband avoids speaking directly to wife even in private	No	Wife may not call husband by name and vice versa		
7. Prohibition to manifest love for one's own child before others	Yes	Yes. Also may not speak of child of person present	Yes. Father may not carry or fondle it	Yes	Yes. May not carry or say friendly word to child	Yes. Rule is very strict	
8. Husband must avoid parents-in-law	For several years	For a year after marriage	Husband may never speak to mother-in-law	No		Yes	
9. Wife must avoid older male relatives of husband (or husband must avoid relatives of wife)			Wife may not mention name of husband's first-cousin	No	May not call them by name	Yes	
10. The couple may not be seen together by parents or parents-in-law	For a year after marriage	For a year after marriage	Yes			Yes, during period of separation	Yes, during period of separation

591
585
608

8: Lužbetak E-4 (no date) 1951 RH1 Caucasia RH1

trace of this epoch. He goes on to say that the *kalym* was originally a form of bloodwite demanded for bride-stealing, which later evolved into a means of compensating the family of the bride for the loss of a worker. Although Ladyženskij's interpretations are generally good, we connot agree with him in this particular point. It has never been proven that bride-stealing was the original form of marriage anywhere in the world. Moreover, it seems to be much more probable that bride-stealing resulted from the practice of bride purchase rather than vice versa. That *kalym* evolved from bloodwite is very improbable, especially in the Caucasus, because reconciliation by means of bloodwite seems to be a relatively recent substitution for actual blood vengeance.

(2) The various husband-wife avoidances, such as not mentioning the name of one's husband or wife, not using the second person, avoiding all conversation in public, etc. may be an expression of the superior position of the male sex in Caucasian society (cf. *supra*, pp. 152—159).[40]

(3) The parent and parent-in-law avoidance, the obligatory avoidance of older male relatives of the husband, the prohibition of inquiring about the health of the wife's or husband's relatives, and similar practices are difficult to explain.

Parent-in-law avoidances are certainly among the most universal practices known to man. In fact, this form of avoidance is so universal that Lowie does not hesitate to write, "From the extremely wide range of parent-in-law avoidance, the absolute universality of these rules might be conjectured on the ground that, where unrecorded, the customs have merely eluded notice."[41] In Australia, for example, "it was formerly death for a man to speak to his mother-in-law."[42] In New Britain if a man were speaking accidently with his mother-in-law, the horror of the "crime" would most likely lead to suicide.[43]

The interpretation of parent-in-law taboos has baffled all ethnologists, and a satisfactory answer still has not been given. The parent-in-law avoidance has been connected with exogamy and bride-capture ;[44] it has been considered a vestige of matriarchy, an expression of awe for the mistress of the household ;[45] it has also been considered as a means to prevent improper intercourse. We may have here a case of convergence, based more on human psychology than on any particular institution ; nor is there any reason to attribute the same cause for the practice in all parts of the world. This is but another important ethnological problem that waits to be solved.

---

[40] The Caucasians seem to be of the opinion that separation is the best means of fostering conjugal love (cf. Leontovič, II, pp. 254 f, § 176).

[41] *Primitive Society*, p. 88.

[42] Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South East Australia*, p. 267.

[43] H. H. Romilly, "The Islands of the New Britain Group," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, n. s. IX, p. 9.

[44] Cf. A. H. Post, "Ueber die Sitte, nach welcher Verlobte und Ehegatten ihre gegenseitigen Verwandten meiden," *Globus*, LXVII (1895), pp. 176 f.

[45] Cf. R. Briffault, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 266 f.